

Castlemaine Naturalist

September 2007

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Photographing fungi.

Photo: Trevor Wheeler

Excursion to Conglomerate Gully Flora Reserve 11/8/07

Leader: Joy Wetherill

The first leg of the journey was down the Calder Highway to the Gisborne turn-off. This road gave us access to the town of Riddells Creek. Joy had advised us that the bakery (our meeting point with members who had come from directions other than Castlemaine) had excellent fare and those who did partake agreed Joy's recommendations were correct. We lunched in the park across the road from the bakery.

Next leg was a short drive to the reserve that was, according to the notes helpfully supplied by Joy, donated by the McCutcheon family in 1983. The park consists of 85.28 hectares and was first occupied by the aborigines of the Gunung Willam Balluk Tribe between 20,000 and 30,000 years ago. The reserve is mainly composed of conglomerate rock (small rounded pebbles and other rocks which have been cemented together in a fine grained sandy matrix). I saw this as a metaphor for our group (well rounded individuals cemented together in their common interest of natural history).

There is a 2.9 km walking track in the form of a loop. For me one of the highlights was seeing a stand of Austral Grass Trees *Xanthorrhoea australis*, which seemed oddly out of place. Sadly my reputation as 'orchid spotter' was seriously diminished when the only orchid (a Tall Greenhood *Pterostylis melagramma*) was discovered by another member of our group. I had overlooked the orchid in my haste to find a Necklace Fern *Asplenium flabellifolium*.

The final leg of our journey was to Joy's place for afternoon tea. SHHH! A well kept secret – Joy had provided an excellent fare of scones, home-made strawberry jam and cream – something the people of Devonshire would have approved of. Before departing from Joy's place, we were shown around her garden where there are some huge eucalypts that Joy

told us had been purchased as tube stock. Two other features of Joy's garden are a tiny creek (made by Joy) and a courtyard wall featuring paintings by Joy.

Some plants identified at the reserve were:

Broad-leaved Peppermint *Eucalyptus dives*, Narrow-leaf Bitter –pea *Daviesia leptophylla*, Common hovea *Hovea heterophylla*, Common Wood-rush *Luzula meridionalis* sp agg, Hop Wattle *Acacia stricta*, Prickly Moses *Acacia verticillata*, Large-leaf Bush-pea *Pultenaea daphnoides*, Snow daisy *Olearea lirata*, Forest Buttercup *Ranunculus plebeius*, Prickly Cryptandra *Cryptandra amara*, Green Rock-fern *Cheilanthes austrotenuifolia*, Necklace Fern *Asplenium flabellifolium*, Maidenhair Fern *Adiantum aethiopicum* and Water Ribbons *Triglochin procera*.

Birds recorded were:

Superb Fairy Wren, Crimson Rosella, White-throated Treecreeper, Kookaburra, Grey Shrike-thrush and Pied Currawong

Natalie de Maccus

Vale Anne Lee

Anne grew up in Castlemaine and was a much-loved friend, musician, concerned conservationist and caring nurse to many in our community. Our deepest sympathy to Geoff, Annette, Susan, and the Parnaby family.

Concern over Roadside Grading

Several reports have been received of roadside grading where roads have been significantly widened and numerous turnouts constructed in a way that is most destructive and damaging to roadside vegetation. Much time and effort has been spent by members over the years to convey to councils and government departments the significance of these roadside reserves as sanctuaries of remnant vegetation and critical habitat – there was even an excellent video made in 1992 by the Dept of Conservation and Environment and the Victorian Roadsides Conservation Committee, (*Managing Linear Reserves*) specifically aimed at educating grader drivers about the importance of care while grading along country roads – sadly it is probably in the back of a cupboard somewhere.

If you see the grader in your area, stop and have a friendly word with him/her – let them know that you value your roadside! Write to the council CEO or VicRoads (numbered roads) to let them know your concerns and ask them about grader driver education. Act responsibly as custodians of our roadsides and request for them the care they deserve. G. Harris

October Excursion to The Long Forest Reserve

By Bruce Donaldson

Given that the destination of the excursion on October 13th is about a 75 minute drive from Castlemaine, I thought the members might like some details about its significance in advance so as to be able to decide if you feel it is going to be worth your while.

The Long Forest is a relatively small (800 hectares) clearly defined area of remnant bull mallee just outside Bacchus Marsh very close to Lake Merrimu. It constitutes the only occurrence of bull mallee south of the Divide. It contains an interesting mix of other trees too, most rather unusual to the area. A change in climatic conditions over several thousand years caused the mallee to retreat north but here it persisted due to the poor soils and low rainfall. It lies in the rain shadow covering the Werribee Plains.

The highlight of the day, however, will be the fact that local ornithologist Marilyn Hewish, and author of "Birds of the Long Forest 1889-2005" and a sub-editor of HANZAB, has agreed to be our guide for the day. Marilyn has been studying the area intensively for 25 years and she knows it like the back of her hand. Although her main interest is birds, she is highly informative on all aspects of the area. I can guarantee a worthwhile day out with her as she has taken me and others down into the Long Forest on numerous occasions and to witness her skill in identifying birds by their calls alone has to be seen to be believed.

Book Review by Richard Piesse

***Eucalypts of Victoria and Tasmania* by Dean Nicholle**

Blooming Books, Melbourne. 2006.

An excellent new guide to 138 Eucalypts, two Corymbia and one Angophora species, designed for use by anyone with an interest in the trees of S E Australia. The book contains a complete identification key to the Eucalypts and necessary complementary glossary.

Each individual entry displays an excellent distribution map, plus photographic evidence of mature trees, the trunk, buds and fruit: also a detailed description of the characteristics of the tree, its distribution and habitat, cultivation and uses, as well as distinguishing features between similar eucalypts. Highly recommended for every eucalypt enthusiast.

Australian Garden, Royal Botanic Gardens, Cranbourne.

By Tony and Jenny Morton

This was only opened to the public about a year ago, and is already a splendid sight. We visited it towards the end of June '07 and there was quite a lot in flower already (I remember *Eremophilas* in particular), and many bushes and trees were already heavily in bud.

Entering through the Visitor Centre the first thing we saw was a large pot of 'King Greenhoods' (at least 10 inches tall) proudly displayed. Many more species of Greenhoods, as well as other, epiphytic, orchids, are housed in the 'Orchid Undercroft', beneath the café (very good coffee and delicious snacks – a lunch of flathead tails and chips was also very tempting!). The Undercroft leads into the Garden itself from the South.

The centrepiece of this roughly 200 square metre Garden is the 'Red Sand Garden', bounded on the East by the 'Rockpool Waterway' (aquatic plants) and on the East by the 'Dry River Bed'. To the North is the 'Waterhole' (in the C19 a site for sandmining!). The 'Red Sand Garden', a sculpture in itself, is planted with seasonal wildflowers and Saltbush and is inspired 'by the shapes and colours of arid Australia.' There is no public access to it, but it is surrounded by the other, easily accessible Gardens, which are all very different from each other. To the East are the 'Exhibition Gardens'. The 'Home Garden' struck us particularly. It showed native plants, pruned into hedges and laid out in borders, forming the narrow front strip of a typical suburban home, for instance. To the West is 'Eucalypt Walk' with 'Gardens' of Stringybarks, Bloodwoods, Peppermints etc. Most of these trees are still very small, of course, but one imagines they will be magnificent in 100 years' time.

There's a large, park-like area of young *Angophora costata*, looking very fine and healthy, stones and plants from all areas of Australia are divided up by blanched ship's hawsers, and filled with ground covers of graded coloured stones and mussel shells! There are innumerable ideas here for landscaping: quirky sculptures composed of watering cans, a splendid 'Kids' Backyard', a 'Desert Discovery Camp' etc. The 'Escarpment Wall Sculpture' is extensive and most imposing.

All plants are labelled and show their distribution in Australia. Plants that are not displayed with an Australian location label are cultivars, and there are many magnificent examples of these. One is left with an impression of formality and orderliness – qualities not usually associated with Australian flora, perhaps. The Garden shows that Australian plants, from groundcover to large trees, can rival any of the more traditional ones that we are too used to seeing in our yards in Australia.

The Garden was designed by Taylor Cullity Lethlean, with Paul Thompson. 'Stage 2' of the Garden – to the North – is being started later this year.

Three kilometres further East, down Stringybark Drive, is the 'old' (dating from about 1970?) Stringybark Picnic Area (which is all there was when it was the 'Annexe' to the Royal Botanic Gardens in Melbourne). The walks are through the thickly vegetated, heathy country that must have covered this part of Victoria before European settlement. I (Tony) remember doing several Butterfly counts in the 1980s, walking along Possum Gully Track to Trig Point and back along Wylie's Creek – about 6 km. I counted 17 species in all, but this list is by no means exhaustive.

The staff are knowledgeable, friendly, and dedicated to this venture. We strongly recommend a visit.

Observations

- Flame Robin at Kalimna. And over 100 Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos overhead at Wesley Hill. Penny Garnett
- Two Lyrebirds along roadside and also Ravens on snowline on road to Hotham. Natasha Harris
- 3-4 pairs of Red-rumped Parrots feeding on ground at Bendigo Municipal Offices. Nina Cole
- White-eared Honeyeater at Kaweka. George Broadway
- Bassian Thrush at Macedon. Bruce Donaldson
- Flocks of Red-browed Finches at the Castlemaine Golf Course. Anne van Gemert
- 1/8 Kororoit Creek – Australian White Ibis, Little Egret and Little Pied Cormorant.
2/8 At Brimbank Park – Darter, Little Black Cormorant, Australian Wood Duck, Little Egret and Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo.
9/8 Point Philip Bay Walk – Darters, Pacific Gulls (fishing) and Silver Gulls. Richard Piesse
- On train to Hampton – looked like dolphins breaking the surface of the water. Natalie de Maccus
- 11/8 Brush-tailed Phascogale sighted making its way down tree trunk in White Gum Road, Barkers Creek (seen in trucks headlights). Ed Oram and Ben Thomson.
- 20/8 Regular pair of White-browed Scrub-wrens feeding on insects in newly mowed grass at Barkers Creek. Geraldine Harris
- Junction of Sandy Creek and Pullans Road – five male Flame Robins and one female. Female Crested Bell Bird hopping about in garden and unidentified bird of prey. Alison Rowe

- Bronze Cuckoo, Golden Whistler and Yellow-tufted Honeyeater. Noel Young
- Australian Raven dunking bread in birdbath and then flying off with it (possibly, to young birds). Also Crested Bellbird heard on FOBIF Asylum Reserve Walk 19/8. Chris Morris
- Blue Caladenia *Cyanicula caerulea* on house block (Hans van Germert) and at Muckleford (Noel Young).
- Dwarf Greenhood *Pterostylis nana* flowering and Blunt Greenhood *Pterostylis curta* in bud. Natalie de Maccus
- 24/8 Fuscous honeyeaters suddenly turned up again after a complete absence since some time in May. (Though they have not absented themselves in my four previous winters here.) Red Wattlebirds returned the same day - usually they are (over) abundant but I hadn't seen them for many weeks. Striated Pardalotes have also arrived - haven't heard or seen them for weeks either. 26/8! First sighting of a Fan-tailed Cuckoo on the block! Alison Rowe
- 3/9 We just enjoyed watching a pair of mistletoe birds just 2 to 8 feet outside the window. We haven't seen any for months - we usually start to see them in November so this is early. The male was singing a lot, and also appeared to be taking nectar from a feijoa flower. Alison Rowe
- 4/9 Olive-backed Oriole calling in garden. Geraldine Harris

From the Business Meeting 26/7/07

Welcome to new member: Denis Hurley

- Vote of thanks to Rita for standing in as president for part of this year.
- Chris Morris to attend the meeting of the Central Victorian Landscape Restoration Project (Norman Wettenhall Foundation) on Aug 28.
- Swift Parrot Survey in August: Poor response from members, no parrots sighted.
- Broom Pull: Small number achieved a good mornings work but still more to be done. 50 plants need replacing next June.
- Workshop Action Plans: A meeting of section leaders will be called in approx one month to discuss completed action plans.
- A joint submission regarding the Bendigo Forest Management Plan is being drawn up by an appointed subcommittee (due date Sept 7).
- Roadside Cleanup: Good attendance (8) on a very pleasant morning.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Subscriptions for 2007 (includes postage of monthly newsletter)

Ordinary membership: Single \$22, Family \$30

Pensioner or student: Single \$19, Family \$24

Thank you to this month's newsletter contributors.

Your contributions make the newsletter more interesting and the editing task a pleasure. Choose your own topic or try one of the following....

What is your approach to weed eradication?

What water and energy saving practices work for you?

Write about a native plant that interests you.

How did you become interested in nature?

Send your articles, reports, questions, observations etc to Geraldine Harris, P O Box 703,

Castlemaine, 3450 or Ph 54742244 or gedharris@castlemaine.net

Camouflage in Nature



Shingleback on the ground

Photos: Geraldine Harris



Tree Dragon on dead Grass Tree

Extra Events

- **Fri Oct 19. Norman Wettenhall and Trust for Nature Workshop.** Landscape Restoration – creating long-term landscape restoration. Discussion, workshop ideas and keynote speakers (Ray Thomas, Regent Honeyeater Project in the Lurg Hills; Rae Talbot, Hindmarsh Bio-link Project; Doug Robinson and Susan Sleigh, Grey-crowned Babbler Project and Longwood Plains Biodiversity Project. 9.30am – 3.30pm Garden Room, Buda, Hunter St, Castlemaine. RSVP Oct 10. Beth Mellick 5472 1316, 0431 219 980
- **Thu Nov 8. Newstead Landcare Meeting - How to find out about native vegetation on the web.** Newstead Community Centre, 8pm. Non-members welcome. Ian Higgins of North Central Catchment Management Authority will tell us about the wonderful website he has been developing for NCCMA. If you want a sneak preview go to <http://dev.nccma.vic.gov.au/bmp/>

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme

September 2007

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 8.00 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at Broadways, 7 Wheeler Street, at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

Fri Sept 14. Bush Heritage Australia – Paul Foreman. Learn about BHA projects such as the Nardoo Hills reserves, abutting the Wychetella Nature Conservation Reserve, that protect some of the most threatened ecosystems in southern Aust. UCA Hall, (enter off Lyttleton St), 8pm.

Sat Sep 15. Field Trip: Orchid Walk. Depart from opp motel in Duke St at 1.30pm sharp. BYO afternoon tea. Contact: Geraldine Harris 5474 2244.

Wednesday Evening Wildflower Walks: Visitors welcome. Wear Sturdy shoes. Depart from opp motel in Duke Street at 4pm sharp, return by 5.30pm. Contact: Geraldine Harris 5474 2244.

Wed Sept 19. Wildflower Walk 1 Geoff Harris

Wed Sep 26. Wildflower Walk 2 Chris Morris

Wed Oct 3. Wildflower Walk 3 Hans van Gemert

Wed Oct 10. Wildflower Walk 4 Noel Young

Wed Oct 17. Wildflower Walk 5 (depending on season)

Fri Oct 12 Currawinya National Park and Lake Eyre. Hans and Anne Van Gemert. UCA Hall (enter from Lyttleton Street), 8pm.

Sat Oct 13. Field Trip: The Long Forest - Bachus Marsh. Leaders: Bruce Donaldson and Marilyn Hewish will lead us to good birding sites in this remnant area of valley. Full-day excursion. Depart from car park opp motel in Duke St at 9am or make own way to Merrimu Reservoir car park (75km) by 10.15am. BYO lunch, morning & afternoon tea. Contact: Bruce Donaldson, 5427 0364.

19 20, 21 Oct. Club Campout in the Grampians. Contact: G Harris 5474 2244.

2007 Committee

Natalie de Maccus (President) 5472 4499

Alison Rowe (Treasurer) 0408 899 283

Hans van Gemert (Public Officer) 5472 1082

Debbie Worland 5472 2474

George Broadway (Secretary) 5472 2513 georgebroadway@bigpond.com

Geraldine Harris (Newsletter Editor) 5474 2244, gedharris@castlemaine.net

Rita Mills 5472 4553

Chris Morris 0418 996 289

Richard Piesse 0448 572 867

Noel Young

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc., PO Box 324, Castlemaine, 3450. Inc
#A0003010B